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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how Fort Hays State University (FHSU) in Hays, Kansas, is attempting to infuse elements of cultural diversity into its curriculum in order to increase students' sensitivities to and knowledge of other cultures. It reviews research and writings on cultural diversity in American society and in American higher education in particular. The paper then examines recent efforts to include FHSU in a nationwide curriculum and faculty development network known as "American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning," which is designed to have institutions in the planning stages of infusing diversity courses in their general education curriculum benefit from the experiences of resource institutions that already have such courses in place. FHSU was paired with Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and received a $25,000 grant from the American Association of Colleges and Universities to support its participation in the network over a 2-year period. (MDM)

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Cultural Diversity Infusion: Is it a Reality or Illusion?

ED 388 137

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Abstract

Cultural Diversity Infusion: Is it a Reality or Illusion?

As they participate in an American democracy of increasing diversity, students need to develop within them a sense of informed and active citizenship, appreciation of different perspectives and correction of erroneous information, understanding and appreciation of those things which make us distinct as well as those which make us one. The purpose of this essay is to explain how Fort Hays State University (FHSU) is attempting to infuse elements of cultural diversity into its curriculum in order to increase students' sensitivities and knowledge. There is a pressing need for an intellectual awareness of the causes and effects of structured inequalities and prejudicial exclusion in American democracy, and for an ability to discuss and critically analyze contemporary and historical issues of race, ethnicity, gender and social class. With those objectives in mind, FHSU formed a Diversity Grant Team and a Diversity Awareness Committee, of which I have been a member. FHSU submitted a grant proposal and received $25,000 from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) concerning the topic of "Cultural Diversity and American Democracy: Implications for Moral and Civic Responsibility." FHSU intends to address the challenges of diversity, democracy and liberal learning by using its curricular arrangements to foster "civic competencies" and promote a better understanding of how equality, justice and human dignity depend on the workings of democratic institutions. Rather than assume a liberal arts education in and of itself will produce these competencies for the responsible and active citizen in a multicultural society, a new FHSU integrative course or set of courses in the general education experience phase will help to cultivate them in an explicit way. This explicit way or strategy will be two-dimensional. First, a new interdisciplinary course addressing U.S. cultural diversity will be developed with a focus on the importance of power relations. The course will go beyond any attempt to simply define or describe the richness or variety in U.S. society. It will represent an explicit attempt to help students address the implications of diversity from a critical and revealing perspective. Second, an effort will be made to continue the process of "infusing" elements of cultural diversity as an "across-the-curriculum" consideration into as many other courses in the general education program as possible. The infusion approach will enhance awareness of domestic as well as international cultural variety with an emphasis on "connected" learning. This latter focus will attempt to relate the subject matter of more traditional general education courses with information about various cultural connections and groups.

Cultural Diversity Infusion: Is it a Reality or Illusion?

Introduction

More than ever before, human beings experience life in a "global village," wherein information about different others has become essential to their success and survival. Over the years, U.S. universities and colleges throughout the nation have been witnessing an increase in the enrollment of students of diverse backgrounds, reflecting the pluralistic fabric and nature of the American society. This trend has led scholars of all disciplines to realize that, while preserving academic freedom, there is a real need to teach cultural diversity rather than just recognizing it.

The importance of history, strengths, and contributions of what has been called minorities have constituted major educational challenges for faculty and administrators alike. Because of living and competing in a diverse society, higher education in the U.S. found itself faced with a challenge to educate students about cultural diversity in order to adapt to current societal changes. Hence, including diversity as an educational goal in the school system was believed to merit close attention and consideration.

The implementation of multicultural education through offering general education courses has become the main focus in changing university curricula. Diversity grant teams and diversity awareness committees have taken place in almost any campus across the nation. Their main goal has been to find ways for bridging the gap between what has been taught and what ought to be taught in the twenty first century. One of the impediments to multicultural education

has been the charge that it will separate and create division, "thereby fractionalizing the entity of knowledge acquisition and its facilitation process, namely teaching" (Leftwich, 1994, p. 3).

Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to explain how Fort Hays State University (FHSU) has been trying to infuse elements of cultural diversity into its curriculum in order to increase students' awareness, sensitivities, and knowledge about different others. As students participate in U.S. democracy of increasing diversity, they need to develop a sense of informed and active citizenship, appreciation of different perspectives, and correction of erroneous information concerning others. Therefore, a general background information about the topic as well as about FHSU and the efforts that are being made to change the current status are discussed.

Background Information About Topic

Gerald Graff stated in his book, Beyond Culture Wars, that most of the books by authors of color were optional reading rather than required in U.S. institutions. While optional is better than ignoral, he realized that there is much more than this to be done. He advocated infusion of cultural information without focusing on special treatment or fragmentation of the content as a whole. "the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind" (Mill, 1994, p. 9). Infusing culturally relevant materials which affirm and recognize

contributions of various cultural groups may be a welcome approach.

Research findings suggest that there is much activity in academia geared toward implementing the change to a more culturally relevant and responsive curriculum in higher education. However, there is an omnipresent phenomenon of fear, fear of difference and change, and a tendency to adhere to the status quo. Traditionally, scholars have rejected the concept of multiculturalism, for fear of preserving cultural distinctiveness. Therefore, the concept of the melting pot was accepted, nurtured, and promoted throughout the U.S. society as a whole. This reluctance to accept and nurture the concept of pluralism as well as to change the status quo may be understood, but when confronted with a very realistic need which is supported by logic and morality, it must give way to progress and new professional expectations (Leftwich, 1994). This reluctance to change has, in fact, hindered the implementation of multicultural education. Today, failure of the melting pot concept has led to the concept of diversity which promotes pluralism instead of uniformity concerning different groups of people constituting the overall U.S. society.

Cultural diversity consists of instructional sequences of studies attempting to reflect the U.S. culture in general and the other co-cultures in particular, not through assimilation, but through acculturation and obvious subcultural variations. Cultural diversity encompasses both similarities and differences among people within a framework of equal acknowledgment and respect for these similarities and differences. Such approach is different from

other approaches which emphasize the differences and ignore the similarities among various cultures and subcultures.

Creating awareness of cultural diversity became sine qua non to effective instructional strategies in higher education. Racial, ethnic, linguistic, handicapped, gender, and non-traditional minorities along with the dominant majority became a major concern for educators across the nation. The curriculum has become a first target for change to reflect cultural diversity rather than uniformity. Thus, each discipline or area started to research the impact of including specific contents reflecting certain minority perspectives. Instructors have been asked to develop class material and presentations indicating relationships of culturally different people and their contributions to the overall culture within their discipline. Attempting to relate one's teaching specialty to the perspectives of the majority and various minorities has been emphasized in many U.S. institutions.

Until the 1960s, curricula had been somewhat static and the idea of diversity or multiculturalism had not yet been invented. Because of the Civil Rights Movement, Negroes became Blacks, Mexican-Americans became Chicanos, American-Indians became Native Americans, and so forth. These various American minorities had shared a common history of exclusion, struggle, and resistance (Hu-DeHart, 1993). Since the 1960s, minorities have been asking for greater access to higher education, recruitment of more minority faculty, and the creation of programs related to various ethnic backgrounds, generally known as ethnic studies. These ethnic

studies programs were actually the beginning of multicultural curriculum reform in higher education wherein diversity can be studied rather than just recognized. However, European-Americans, who dominated the U.S. society and defined its identity, directed ethnic studies to focus on marginalized and mostly powerless groups who were then racially constructed as distinct from the White majority.

Since the late 1970s, a new trend in immigration has been showing the U.S. population becoming rapidly more "colored" and ever more diverse by art, ethnicity, food, language, literature, race, religion, language, and many other cultural aspects. This new trend in immigration has also led to new demographics. The new demographics have caused scholars to seriously consider redesigning the core curriculum in order to reflect the new reality and start educating all Americans of various minorities if the U.S is to remain competitive. This type of education has to be accompanied with a moral responsibility to bring about a truly pluralistic democracy. Perpetuating the hypocrisy of the past would not help the U.S. social policies anymore. Inclusive rather than exclusive policies ought to be followed. Excluding nonwhites from the Jeffersonian pursuit of happiness would undermine the strength of the U.S. in the long run. Thus, educators, have a major role to play, and teaching cultural diversity may be part of the solution. In short, scholars have a moral responsibility to educate for citizenship and leadership all U.S. citizens of all races and ethnic backgrounds in order to live and compete in a world that is

becoming more interdependent (HuDeHart, 1993).

Because culture is a way of life based on people's values and beliefs, it is assumed to affect everything they do and shape their perception of reality. Thus, the more pluralistic the U.S. society becomes, the more its institutions need to reflect its reality. Educating students about the various beliefs and values that will affect the world wherein they live presents itself as the most basic and logical need. With this in mind, university curricula seem an easy target to infuse cultural diversity content to educate students. There are academic disciplines whose content areas lend themselves more readily to infusing cultural diversity elements than others. For instance, communication, history, language, music, sociology, psychology, and the arts in general can infuse cultural diversity elements without tedious efforts. However, adding multicultural material to mathematics, and other sciences may be challenging and can require special efforts to infuse certain activities, if at all possible. Therefore, it is important to consider a variety of methods to disseminate multicultural content.

Several scholars discussed various methods or approaches that may be used to disseminate multicultural information in higher education curricula (Banks, 1989; Cardoza & Fieweger; Cole, 1990). Cole (1990) identified four different approaches. The first one is the Pyramid Approach which is a series of prepared multicultural courses. Each course may extend the one that preceded it. The Unit Approach is a second one, including a unit in each course which can be devoted to the relationship between multiculturalism and the

subject matter to be taught. The Course Approach is a third method wherein a specific course dealing with multicultural issues in a curriculum can be offered. The Infusion Approach is a fourth method which incorporates multicultural content into each unit of a course as appropriate.

Following Banks' approaches and guidelines to integrating the curriculum with ethnic content, Cardoza and Fieweger (1990) had suggested several approaches that can be used in adding various cultural perspectives to university courses. These approaches may be helpful in infusing multicultural content into existing courses. First of all, the Contribution Approach is a method where the instructor can include important figures from other cultures who have contributed to the specific discipline. Artistic contributions of practitioners and theorists would lead to an understanding of the discipline at a time the instructor can shed some light on the culture of the contributor. Authors' contributions from other cultures can be discussed in the context of their own cultures and how those cultures affected them and their work. In addition, the instructor can invite guest speakers to represent the perspective of those cultures regarding the topic in question.

Second, the Additive Approach is somewhat similar to the Unit Approach identified by Cole (1990). It consists of infusing a specific unit or chapter in a course rather than content which is relevant to the topic discussed. The unit would be devoted to the discussion of the relationship between cultural diversity and the particular topic being taught.

Third, the Transformation Approach consists of restructuring certain courses. Instead of infusing multicultural content into lectures and presentations, this approach may encourage students to consider the subject matter at hand in the light of various racial and ethnic perspectives. The subject can also be looked at from the perspective of those who were actively involved in its development or were influenced by it.

Fourth, the Social Action Approach is a technique allowing students to study various perspectives concerning social problems. Collecting and analyzing data from these various perspectives regarding social problems, students can, then, proceed to make decisions toward reaching pertinent solutions to the problems. Any discipline may refer to one or more of these approaches that best suit its own subject matter and content for infusion.

Understanding of, and respect for, other cultures would only prepare students to live in a pluralistic society. The U.S. "is a country that is less a melting pot than a salad bowl, where each culture, like the ingredients of a salad, keeps its own flavor while contributing to the whole" (Rupp, 1994, p. 6). Infusion of cultural diversity into the curriculum of a university can only be done through informed and willing faculty. Therefore, faculty members have, at their disposal, the tools to provide a background in cultural diversity, if they are willing to do it.

Background Information About FHSU

There are many reasons as to why to integrate and infuse the general education program with multicultural concepts. First, FHSU

students live and interact with others in a society that has become more pluralistic than ever before. Living and interacting with others who are comfortable with their cultural backgrounds and who expect to be accepted as equal partners necessitate effective and reflective education of a new generation (Arevalo, 1994).

Second, FHSU students are mostly rural and rarely travel outside of western Kansas. They constitute 95% of the university student body. The other 5% is Hispanic, African American, and international students. Minority students complain about being ignored or looked down upon by their classmates just because they are different. Thus, to include American pluralism, while working on a new general education program, is to combat alienation, provincialism, and ignorance about other ways of thinking, believing, and behaving. Learning about diversity can help students become more effective communicators with others, more tolerant about each other's differences, and more respecting and accepting of each other in their daily functions and interactions.

Third, addressing the issue of ethnocentricity and diversity in undergraduate education by redesigning the core curriculum of general education or developing an interdisciplinary core courses would not just help students to better understand the world surrounding them, but also provide faculty with new amunition to redefine what constitutes a liberal education for a new generation of students (Arevalo, 1994).

Multiculturalists at FHSU are heeding the calls of an intellectual imperative to correct the omissions and distortions of

the past. They seem to advocate true freedom and democracy for all U.S. citizens, for they understand the stark contradiction between the call for equality and the current practice. They have realized that miniorities do not enjoy more than nominal freedom and full citizenship. They have assumed the responsibility to educate their students about cultural diversity in order to improve citizenship, respect, understanding and sensitivity.

Thus, in 1993, FHSU developed and submitted a grant proposal to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) entitled, "Cultural Diversity and American Democracy: Implications for Moral and Civic Responsibility." The proposal requested the inclusion of FHSU in the creation of a nationwide curriculum and faculty development network known as "American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy and Liberal Learning." The project was one of several coordinated by the AAC&U and funded through a grant from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). It included 60 institutions, 20 resource institutions and 40 planning institutions. Each resource institution was to be paired with two planning institutions. Resource institutions implied that certain universities or colleges already had in place a curriculum element on U.S. diversity, had invested in faculty development related to multiculturalism, and had established cultural diversity as a central learning goal. The primary goal was to have schools, which were in the planning stages of infusing diversity courses in their general education curriculum, benefit from the experience of resource institutions.

A 10-member planning committee (Diversity Grant Team) was formed at FHSU. It consisted of representatives from the university four colleges, faculty responsible for teaching multiculturalism, and individuals from several campus groups including the Diversity Awareness Committee. Larry Gould, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, headed the Diversity Grant Team, of which I was a member. A grant application was endorsed by the provost and submitted. On Dec. 23, 1993, the AAC&U selected FHSU as one of 40 planning institutions out of 144 apllicants. FHSU was paired with Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and received a $25,000 grant to support its participation in the network over a two-year period.

Purpose of the grant

According to Gould (1994), the purpose of the grant was twofold: (1) to develop one or more courses focusing on "the relationship between U.S. cultural diversity and the survival of democratic institutions" for inclusion in the new general education program; and (2) to support faculty development activities which are related to the new cultural diversity curricular initiative. Unless faculty are supported to do a good job, they will feel uncomfortable and less than prepared in trying to deliver new curricular initiatives.

In short, the purpose of this grant was to help faculty and enhance student learning about cultural diversity. Thus, faculty who showed interest in incorporating elements of cultural diversity in their courses were urged to contact officials at FHSU and join in the efforts for maximum benefit. One way faculty started to

benefit from the grant was that several members participated in a nine-day National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Seminar, "Boundaries and Borderlands: The Search for Recognition and Community in America," which was held on the campus of Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., July 29-August 7, 1994. The seminar was designed to help faculty prepare to work with the content and pedagogical aspects and initiatives contained in the FHSU initial application. Participants returned and shared their experience with other team members in order to help the university achieve its goal of integrating cultural diversity "across-the-curriculum." (Gould, 1994).

Conclusion

The concept of multicultural education is broad and complex. It includes the physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions of people. To infuse curricula with multicultural cntent is to try to reflect the totality of American cultures/subcultures, not through assimilation, but through acculturation and clear distinction of various cultural aspects. Addressing both the similarities as well as the differences among various groups of people within a context of equal acknowledgement and respect constitutes the main focus of multicultural education.

Teaching at the university level assumes certain degree of autonomy. Autonomous instruction means that the individual instructor can, to a certain extent, determine the type of actual content of courses he or she is supposed to teach. Unless faculty members are involved in the process of infusing cultural diversity

and developing new courses with multicultural components in them, faculty as well as their students will remain apathetic toward teaching American pluralism and cultural diversity. Would FHSU reap the benefits of the grant and its involvement in the two-year project? Would some faculty members and administrators sabotage the efforts of multiculturalists at FHSU? And how receptive would FHSU students be to the new general education program? The answer to these important questions and whether diversity infusion is a reality or illusion remain to be seen in the near future.

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